

Blindingly yellow-white against the dirt of the old battleground, many clusters of horse bones lay scattered; already picked clean and bare by scavengers, bleaching in the scorching-hot sun...

One of the most bitter and violent battles ever fought in the West was fought by Captain John C. Hays and his recruited company of rangers in 1843. President Houston felt a strong need for more frontier protection against Indian raids in Texas. Called the Famous Battle of Bandera Pass, Hays and his men were unexpectedly charged by a large band of Comanche Indians at around 11 o' clock AM at the Pass; momentarily demoralized and shocked. But the Colt 5 and 6 shooters were just invented and 50 to 60 of them were in the rangers' possession, and although they were outnumbered against the Indians, those rifles and pistols were very alien to the Comanche. An Indian seemed to fall every time a puff of smoke and gunpowder released a shot into the waves of raiding savages, splattering pools of scarlet blood into the sea of fighting men.

When the combat tide was at its highest and fighting was at its thickest, the Comanche chief charged and wounded Sergeant Kit Ackland, who then wounded him w/ a bullet from his new pistol. Both of the large, heavy-set men then clinched, and went to the ground. Knives dancing swift and ninja-like, Ackland and the chief rolled over and over, slashing violently and furiously at each other. Their blades flashed and glared in the blazing sun's heat, among the screams and cries of war overlapping with the moans and groans of the dying and wounded. Finally, arising from where the dead chief lay literally cut to pieces of flesh, the ranger; smothered with blood, sweat, and dirt, had won the duel. The Indians finally ceased fighting and retreated to the upper end of the Pass, and

Captain John Hays and his men were in charge of the battleground (Bandera Pass), but with five rangers and many horses dead on their side.

This gruesome battle had occurred on the famous historical site of Bandera Pass, located within the “Cowboy Capital of The World”, or Bandera County. After defeating the Comanche in the Famous Battle of Bandera Pass, those Spanish rangers left flags to warn other Indians against future raids: Hence the name for the county and the Pass, which symbolizes and represents their attempts at decreasing Indian raids in Texas; “Bandera”, Spanish for “flag”.

Starting 25 miles northwest of San Antonio, Bandera County belongs to the Edwards plateau region of southwest Texas. North of Bandera County is Kerr County and Kendall County, and South are Medina County and Uvalde County. East lies Bexar County, and Real County is located West of Bandera County. Bandera County is 792 square miles of rolling hills, scenic open land, magnificent cypress and cedar trees, sparkling lakes and rivers, with elevations that range from 1,200 to 2,300 feet. The western part of the county is drained by the Sabinal River and the eastern part by the Medina River, which runs from the northwest corner of Bandera County southeast into Medina Lake. Archeological artifacts suggest that the earliest human inhabitants arrived around 6,000 to 11,000 years ago in Bandera County and settled in rock shelters. Lipan Apaches and Comanche Indian groups occupied the area before the first Spanish explorers came.

In 1853, A. M. Milstead, Thomas Odem, P. D. Saner, and their families camped along Medina River and began making cypress shingles, and James and DeMontel

surveyed and platted the town of Bandera. Later that year, they built a horse-powered sawmill and opened a commissary store. About 250 Mormons led by Lyman Wight reached Bandera in 1854, eventually settling at a site now covered by Medina Lake, known for many years as "Mormon Camp", manufacturing many types of furnishings such as tables and chairs, which they sold in San Antonio. But Wight died before the colony was fully established, and most of the Mormons moved to Utah or settled in San Antonio. In February 1855, sixteen Polish families arrived in Bandera to work in James and DeMontel's sawmill, and in August of the same year August Klappenbach opened the first store and post office. On January 25, 1856, the legislature marked off Bandera County from portions of Bexar County, and the new county was formally organized on March 10, 1856.

All types of people from all over North America mosey on down to "The Cowboy Capital of The World" for its amazing music festivals celebrating its rich and abundant Texan culture and history. Puffs of dust billow up as many sets of cattle hooves clomp down Bandera's Main Street at its largest annual festival, "Celebrate Bandera: Kings of Western Swing", which is held every Labor Day weekend. As the multi-colored stream of alabaster, tan, khaki, beige, and sable trickles into this unique festival, the people are reminded of a time (or the 1870s, to be exact) when Bandera was a booming town, very important to developing Texas's economy. A time when Bandera County was a staging area for cattle drives, a gathering point to begin the long journey up the Western Trail.

Local Bandera farm boys traded their straw farming hats and sandals for cowboy hats, boots, and bandannas. They learned to rope and ride, preparing for the harsh environment of the cattle drive trail. Holding pens were built by ranchers who signed on

as trail bosses, and the county had around 4,740 cattle which later increased to 15,308.

The 1870s era of great cattle drives had improved Bandera's population by about 2th thousand people, into a hearty county of ranching and cowboy culture that it will always preserve and is well known for today.

Stretching out into the horizon, many areas in Bandera County seemed like a mud-brown chartreuse ocean layered under a splattering of cream-colored sea foam to the human eye, in the 1880s. Sheep and goats (Angora goats in particular) gradually replaced cattle over the next few decades, because they were more well-adapted to the climate and terrain. The fluffy alabaster coats sported by these ebony mammals helped Bandera County become a very important source of wool and mohair. Since raising sheep and goats on the thin limestone soils of Bandera's hilly terrain was more profitable to landowners, wool and mohair began to be shipped in significant quantities and accounted for its most important export product.

With a wonderful and abundant history and an authentic and intriguing Texan culture that helped greatly in developing our state, Bandera is now very dependent on the attraction of tourists to Texas. The spirit of the "Cowboy Capital of the World" will live on in all of Bandera's well known ranches and in all those championship rodeo cowboys who had learned to rope and ride in Bandera County!

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